

The Peasant and the Rebel: Indian Aruba in the historical age

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Abstract

The Aruban population is proud of its Amerindian cultural legacy, which acts as a 'reinvented tradition' in Aruba's national identity. In this paper, I deconstruct the myth and facts of this Indian heritage in the colonial age (1636-1795). On one hand, Aruba was a place of refuge to Indian settlers on the almost but forgotten island. Aruba was a safe haven or a reserve to some of the last surviving Indian populations in the Caribbean archipelago. On the other hand, during the 17th and 18th century, Christianization took place and the formation of a unique Caribbean peasant type – 'the cunucero' – occurred. The increasing presence and pressure by the Dutch administration resulted in protest and rebellion from the side of the Aruban Indians. During the 19th century, the Amerindian population assimilated into the colonial society.

Résumé

La population d'Aruba est fière de son patrimoine culturel amérindien qui figure comme une 'tradition réinventée' dans l'identité nationale d'Aruba. Ici je sépare le mythe des faits dans cet héritage de l'époque coloniale (1636-1795). D'une part Aruba était un refuge pour les Indiens qui voulaient s'établir dans l'île quasi oubliée à cette époque. Aruba a servi d'abri ou de refuge pour quelques-unes des dernières populations amérindiennes qui ont survécu dans l'archipel caraïbe. D'autre part, pendant le 17^e et le 18^e siècle la christianisation a pris pied et on a vu apparaître un type unique de paysan caraïbe nommé 'cunucero'. La présence et la pression croissantes de l'administration néerlandaise ont amené une opposition et une rébellion de la part des Indiens d'Aruba. Pendant le 19^e siècle, la population amérindienne a été assimilée dans la société coloniale.

Resumen

La población arubana está orgullosa de su herencia cultural india que actúa como una tradición re-inventada en la identidad nacional arubana. En este trabajo separo los mitos de los hechos de esta herencia india del siglo colonial (1636-1795). Por una parte Aruba era un lugar de refugio para los grupo indios en la isla casi olvidada. Aruba era un puerto seguro o una reserva para algunos de los últimos sobrevivientes de las poblaciones indias en el archipiélago caribeño. Por otra parte tuvo lugar, durante los siglos 17 y 18, la cristianización y se produjo la formación de un tipo campesino único en la región caribeña, el cunuquero'. La presión creciente de la

administración holandesa causaron protestas y rebeliones de parte de los indios arubanos. Durante el siglo 19 la población india se asimiló en la sociedad colonial.

The Amerindian legacy is of great importance to the Aruban identity. The Indian past serves as a source of inspiration for artists of all disciplines, from literature to visual arts. Images of Indian rock drawings feature on our Aruban paper currency (see illustration 1). It features prominently in Aruba's political rhetoric and is used to distinguish Aruba's cultural identity from neighboring Curaçao, which has a stronger Afro-Caribbean heritage. In 1999, it was 500 years ago that Europeans first set foot on Aruba's shores (although scientific proof is still uncertain). Many Arubans did not know whether to call this fifth centenary a commemoration or a celebration (illustration 2). In 1515, the European 'discovery' of the island resulted in the deportation of the Caquetio population of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. Some 2.000 Indians were deported to Santo Domingo to work in the mines. Sixteen years after the European discovery, the rift with the pre-Columbian past was complete.

Nevertheless, Aruba is one of the most Indian islands in the Caribbean region. After the arrival of the Spanish, new Indian groups established themselves on the island. Also, after the Dutch take-over in 1636, Indians -probably refugees or exiles from the mainland- came to settle on the all but forgotten island. As early as 1642, a new group of Indians was living on Aruba (Alofs 1997). Both the Spaniards and the Dutch West India Company used Aruba for cattle breeding. Indians were allowed to settle on the island. In return, men between 15 and 50 years of age assisted in the exploitation of the island. They used to raise cattle, chop wood and take care of the water reservoirs ('tankis'), which provided the cattle with drinking water. Despite two centuries of Dutch colonization of Aruba, the Indians were able to maintain (or develop) their own way of life. As late as in 1880s European scientists (like Dutch amateur archeologist father Koolwijk, German geologist Martin and French scientist Alphonse Pinart) were able to note some words from the native language, spoken by the Aruban Indians before they adopted Papiamentu around 1800. Unfortunately, these words have not yet been identified as belonging to any major Indian language or language group.

However, the cultural continuity of the Indian past into the Aruban present is often exaggerated and the fascination with the Indian past provides us with a clear example of an invented tradition. Aspects of the past, either true or false, either scientifically proven or without an empirical basis, are used to construct a national identity and create cultural borders with other national entities. This perception on the past often functions as a founding myth of the modern nation state (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).

Some of the empirical foundations of this perception of the Indian past have been recorded in history books, such as Hartogs 'Aruba as it was, as it is, from Indian times to the present' (1954, 1980), 'Reconstructing Brasilwood Island' by Versteeg & Ruiz (1995), and 'Ken ta Arubiano?' by Alofs en Merckies (2001). In addition, great numbers of archeological findings

and publications have contributed to the Aruban fascination with its Indian past. Therefore, more research is needed to answer questions concerning the Indian cultural heritage of Aruba.

Encouraged by the Archeological Museum Aruba, I have taken up the challenge to write history backwards, starting at the present fascination with the Indian past towards the point where historiography and archeology meet.

‘Reconstructing Brasilwood Island’ by Versteeg en Ruiz is the best possible introduction to my present research. The authors have collected most of the existing literature on the Indian history of Aruba and put it together in a precise and accurate way. Their thesis is, that European colonial powers showed little interest in Aruba. The policy of the Spanish and the Dutch of admitting Indians to the island, made it possible for the Indian population to survive without much outside interference. I agree with their basic assumption and have tried to add to their work by investigating the existing literature and more importantly, the Dutch, Antillean, and Aruban national and clerical archives.

In this paper, I will focus on the period between 1636 and 1792, when the Dutch West India Company governed Aruba. After the Dutch take-over, the Company prohibited colonization of the island until 1754 when a handful of white colonists were permitted to set up plantations to produce food for the growing population of Curaçao. These efforts were not successful and were discontinued before the turn of the century. The WIC used the island for breeding cattle and chopping wood up to the beginning of the 19th century. Colonization started on a more serious level after 1795. During the rule of the Company, once again, new Indians were permitted to live on Aruba in exchange for their assistance in the exploitation of the island. This was cheaper and safer than sending expensive slaves laborers to the defenseless island. Unfortunately, we have no proof as to the cultural, religious or linguistic origin of this Amerindian population. Van Grol (1980: 110) argues that this group probably came from the Maracaibo region, where there were still wars going on between the Spanish and the Indian population –probably he refers to the Onoto-rebellions, mentioned by Oliver 1989: 207-9, but he does not provide us with a document to give his thesis a scientific basis.

As Versteeg and Ruiz pointed out, Aruba was a reservation for a unique Indian population, comparable to Saint Vincent and Dominica, where Islands Caribs survived the first waves of Spanish colonialism and diseases (Boucher 1992) or the peninsula Guajiro, where the original population survived until the present (Perrin 1980). Nevertheless, the policy of the Dutch West India Company and the missionary activities by Spanish priests from the mainland, had their effect on the Indian population and its culture. In addition, visits by privateers and pirates and contacts with the Venezuelan coastal area contributed to cultural change within the Indian community. I will summarize certain religious, socio-economic and political changes.

Roman Catholicism

In the first place, there were the missionary activities of Spanish priests. Despite the Dutch take-over, Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao remained part of the Spanish diocese of Coro, which Spanish

colonist Juan de Ampíes had founded in 1531 (Cardot 1982, Deive 1995). The Dutch Protestants did not undertake any serious efforts to Christianize the black slave population of Curaçao and Bonaire nor the Indian population on these islands and on Aruba. Spanish (catholic) missionaries used to visit Aruba, irregularly and often illegally. As early as 1668, the Aruban Indians were reported to be Christian and in the 1715 census, all people reported as ‘Indians owning cattle’ had Christian names. In 1750, a Spanish priest built the Chapel of Alto Vista. In 1777, a church dedicated to Santa Anna followed in the village of Noord. Those were the centers of the Indian population.

The catholic regime provided the Indian population with an important social institution. As the priests used to visit Aruba only once or twice a year, local representatives –lay brothers or ‘fiskalen’- would take care of the catholic community during their absence. The ‘fiskalen’ belonged to the most important and rich Indian families of Aruba. Until approximately 1820, members of the well-known Aruban families Sylvester, Alvares and most notably Tromp, guided the catholic Indian community. Nevertheless, the influence of Spanish priests was strong. In the first quarter of the 18th century, Spanish priests encouraged Aruban Indians to settle in Venezuela and establish the villages ‘Pueblo de Santa Anna’ and ‘Carrizal’, both situated near Coro (Martis in Versteeg en Ruiz 1995: 67-8; Klooster 1997: 113). I have found no indication of any form of Indian resistance to the missionary activities by Spanish priests. Neither in the national and clerical archives nor in the ethnographic present have I found any pre-Christian survivals in the Aruban Christian belief or practice.

How different was the case in Guajiro, where the Indian population fiercely opposed the work of the missionaries. Up to the present, the Guajiro populations adhere to pre-Columbian religious beliefs and practices, such as the second burial, intermixed with European Christian ideas (Perrin 1980, 1997). Elsewhere in the Caribbean, Christianity mixed with African belief systems and so new Caribbean religions or cosmologies, such as Santería (Cuba) or Voodoo (Haiti) originated. On Aruba, no persistent syncretism between pre-Colombian (or later) indigenous Indian religious belief systems and Christianity took place.

On the other hand, as will be shown, Catholicism provided the Indian community with some degree of autonomy from the Protestant colonial authorities and with a social institution, which could respond to political changes on the island. From a religious perspective, Aruban Indians belonged to a catholic regime, which had its center in the diocese of Coro/Caracas. From an economic and political point of view, Aruba belonged to the protestant Dutch colonial regime.

Before concluding this section, it is interesting, though food for speculation, to note that in the archives and some recent publications, I have found several remarks (mostly diary quotes from the Company director on Curaçao) in which was reported that mentally insane whites colonists from Curaçao were brought to Aruba to be cured by the Indians. In 1720, Company governor Jean Rodier wrote to his superiors in the Netherlands that a Dutch widow had been sent to Aruba to see if the Indians were able to cure her (ARA.WIC. inv. nr. 602, fol. 94. dd. 20-6-1759). During the 1767 census, the mentally disturbed Jacobus Van Dam was living on Aruba. As early as 1723, during efforts by Swedish mining expert Paulus Printz to discover precious

metals on Aruba, his crew made use of the local Indian community to heal the sick and wounded (Rutten 1999: 138). Unfortunately, we have no proof as to the Indian pre-Columbian nature of these healing practices.

The Aruban ‘cunucero’ as a Caribbean Peasant

The secular or worldly regime of the West India Company influenced the Indian population and culture to a large extent. To assure itself of a labor force, the WIC allowed the Indians to have restricted numbers of cattle and limited provision grounds for their food-supply. To protect its main economic pillar, the famous staple market on Curaçao, the Company did not allow the inhabitants of Aruba to engage in any type of trade. The restrictions that the West India Company imposed upon the population resulted in a process of ‘peasantization’ of the Indian community.

The oldest available population figure dates to 1715 (Jordaan 1997: 120-2, see table 1). On June 28, 1715, exactly 393 Indians lived on the island. Since most of them were women (162) and children (66 boys and 78 girls), Jordaan assumes that many of the men had temporarily left the island to work elsewhere, probably on the mainland, as would be the tradition for centuries to come.

On the same day, a similar list was made up of the number of cattle owned by the Indian population (see table 2a, 2b and 2c). Only thirteen per cent of the adult population possessed cattle. Thirty owners together possessed 210 cows, 206 sheep and no less than 3.246 goats. Goats clearly were the most important cattle. Many households owned herds of mostly 20 to 30 goats.

A more profound census took place in 1767 (Alofs 1996a). This is probably the most important source of information on the demographic and economic situation on Indian Aruba. Company official Jan van der Biest counted the number of households living on Aruba. He also meticulously reported on the number of cattle they owned and the size of their provision grounds or ‘cunucu’s’. The outcome of this investigation shows that the Aruban Indian population indeed had developed into a unique type of peasant, making a living by combining small-scale agriculture and cattle breeding. Social inequality was significant and the poorer peasants most likely also depended on migration labor.

In 1767, 120 households lived on the island (see table 3). Twelve of them were in the service of the West India Company. Approximately eight families had permission from the Company to live on Aruba. Four of them were permitted on the island in an effort to develop large-scale plantations to grow food for the more densely populated Curaçao. Those were the first white colonists to settle on Aruba. Jacobus Van Dam, as we already saw, was most likely on Aruba because of his poor mental health. The remaining 100 families were former Company officials or Indians and their descendants. Most families worked small ‘cunucu’s’, most of them smaller than 2 hectares. The largest agricultural areas belonged to white colonists and the Indians Jabobus Tromp and Maria Magdalena, who had appropriated no less than 87 and 29 hectares.

Van der Biest states that most of the time, the croplands did not provide the population with sufficient food. Raising cattle provided the Indians with another source of income (see table 4a and 4b). To protect the herds, owned by the WIC, the number of cattle the Indians were permitted to breed was restricted. Horses and donkeys served as means of transportation. Twenty-eight of the households not connected to the Company at that moment possessed horses, with a maximum of three. No less than 69 of these households had donkey, six families owned as many as three to six. Cows were raised for their milk and meat. Over 80 families possessed up to nine cows. Sheep and especially goats were the most important cattle. As is the case up to the present, flocks had the size of around 15 to 35 sheep or goats.

Despite the restrictions the WIC imposed on the Indian population, there existed a considerable degree of inequality within the Indian group. There were landless Indians without cattle, but also relatively wealthy Indians. Maria Magdalena for instance had appropriated 29 hectares and owned 60 goats and 12 cows. In 1772, another Indian woman owned no less than 700 sheep. Apparently, there was a considerable degree of social inequality among the Indian population. In 1795, Indian leader Andres Tromp even owned black slaves.

A last source of income to the Indian community was the exchange of goods with the West India Company and visitors. The Indian laborers, when working for the Company received food and limited quantities of goods in return. In 1668, the famous privateer Alexander Exquemelin visited Aruba for a few days. His *'The Buccaneers of America'* is a valuable source of information to Aruban historiography. Exquemelin observed that (despite the ban on trade), the Indian exchanged food for goods as linen and yarn. These exchanges provided the Indian peasant population with goods that could be produced locally.

Obviously, the Dutch policy concerning the Indian population had contributed to the formation of an Indian peasantry on the island. In an earlier paper, Stanley Heinze and I compared the Aruban type of peasant with other types of Caribbean peasants (Heinze and Alofs 1997). The relation between the plantation and the peasantry has been one of the main concerns of Caribbean social scientists for over half a century (Mintz 1989 offers a classical introduction). Most Caribbean peasantry types result from the plantation economy and the system of slavery. In their leisure time, slaves worked their provision grounds and after the abolition of slavery, these 'proto-peasants' became independent peasants. The policy of the WIC resulted in the creation of this particular kind of peasantry, unlike any other Caribbean peasant type, such as the proto-peasants, the runaway slaves (maroons), the early yeomen or the semi-illegal squatters (Mintz 1989, Heinze and Alofs 1997).

Aruban peasants (or: *cunucero*'s) were unique in the sense that it was an Indian based peasant population who had adopted cattle breeding and small-scale, self-supporting agriculture in a reserve like environment. As will be shown below, the legal status of the Aruban *cunucero* was defined vaguely, most explicitly in the regulations concerning statute labor. The Aruban *cunucero* certainly was not an illegal colonist, such as the squatter. The *cunucero* was neither a free colonist such as the early yeomen, nor a slave or proto-peasant. On Aruba, government supervision and colonial presence were limited but not absent, as was the case with the runaway

slaves. The ‘Indian reserve’ on Aruba was much less isolated from outside influences than maroon societies, the ‘African reserves’ of runaway slaves in Surinam, Jamaican and Trinidad. The Aruban-Indian peasantry formed the historical basis for the free peasantry that developed on the island after the arrival of poor white colonists, free colored, and black slaves in the 19th century.

Racial categories, legal provisions and Indian resistance

A third set of outside influences on the Indian population in the 17th and 18th century is of racial, legal and political nature. So far, I have spoken of the Indian population without explaining the racial category ‘Indian’ as it has been used in the historical records. There are many uncertainties on the exact meaning of the word ‘Indian’. Often it was equated with terms like ‘inlanders’ or other similar terms. Expressions like ‘pure Indians’ or ‘colored’ were used in an inconsistent manner. Racial categories in colonial censuses were copied from Curaçaoan, Surinamese, or even Dutch East Indian (Indonesian) contexts. They were not suitable to describe the racial composition of the Aruban population, but surely contributed to the myth of the Indian past (see Anderson 1991: 163-70). In 1819, fifty-two years after his 1767 census, the same Jan van der Biest in a letter to the government secretary discussed the adequacy of the racial categories in the census forms he had received. The forms may have been useful in an Afro-Caribbean context, but according to Van der Biest, were not appropriate to describe the racial composition of the by then semi-Indian community of Aruba. Pre-Mendelan racial Categories such as ‘pustizen’, ‘castizen’ and even (at that time) ‘mestizo’ referred to mixes of Europeans and African (ARA.OAC1, inv. nr. 333 I. No. 90. dd. 6-6-1820, also Hoetink 1958: 86). Often cited figures such as those of 1816, when it was said that 564 ‘real Indians’ lived on Aruba, therefore are not reliable (Hartog 1980: 125).

Also, the legal meaning of the term Indian is uncertain. The legal status of the Indian population in the occupied territories were not laid down in the charter in of the West India Company (Octroy, 1621 in Kunst 1981), nor in ‘Ordre van Regieringe’ (1629, the ‘Order of Government’ in: Schiltkamp & De Smidt 1987 II: 1235). The instructions or decrees of the director of Curaçao did not provide clarity either. Van Grol (1980 I: 110; 141; also Schiltkamp 1972: 9-10) was the first author to conclude that the Aruban Indians were neither slaves nor free men. They were in the permanent, more or less feudal service of the WIC. As already mentioned, Indians were allowed to live on Aruba on the condition that they assisted the WIC in the exploitation of the island. This system of statute labor was called the ‘herendiensten’ and it was not restricted to Indian inhabitants of Aruba. In addition, colonists, admitted to the island after 1754, had to work for the Company or send a slave to take his place. Van Aller (1994: 65, nt. 109) concludes that the system of statute labor was based on the Roman legal term ‘munus’. The populations of the territories occupied by the Dutch West India Company could be forced to perform statute labor and to pay taxes. Personal freedom was subordinate to the interests of the state, and in our case, the Company. On Aruba, as we will see, it was either statute labor or paying taxes. Not both.

The oldest available documents on the labor duty are the instructions of ‘commanders’ of Aruba and Bonaire. As far as Aruba is concerned, the oldest known legal document are the instructions handed to vice-commander Willem de Vosch when leaving to Aruba in 1711. Article 8 stated that the Indians were living and working on Aruba in the service of the West India Company (*‘daar in dienstbaerheyd synde van de Edele Compagnie’*, cited in: Schiltkamp & Smidt 1978: 108). Despite the Roman or feudal legal background of the system of statute labor, to the Indian community of Aruba, it was a Rousseau-like social contract. To them, reciprocity, not subordination was the basis of their relationship to the West India Company, as will become clear when we analyze the tradition of Indian resistance to changes in this unsigned contract.

In the archives, I have come across several instances in which the Indians protested against changes in these traditional rights and obligations (Alofs 1996b). During the second half of the 18th century, the West India Company intensified its presence on the island (Klooster 1997). The colonial pressure on Indian Aruba intensified and the traditional rights and obligations of the Indian were increasingly put under pressure. In addition, Company servants misused the system of statute labor. In both cases, Indians protested and rebelled against the colonial authorities. We have proof of several cases of disobedience and unrest. As early as 1715, the relation between the catholic Indians and the West India Company was tense (Jordaan 1997). In 1740, Indians murdered commander Pieter Boer, probably because of the harsh regime he imposed on them. In 1769, the Indians refused to transport wood to the harbor. This used to be the task of the shipmates who came to ship the wood to Curaçao. In 1786, Indians once again refused to submit to new obligations; in this case, it was the introduction of tax-measures. Indians admitted that statute labor was their obligation, but paying taxes was not. Neither were they willing to assist in the construction of a defense fort at Horse Bay to protect vessels of Curaçao trading companies. Although the Aruban Indians never signed an official peace treaty such as the Amerindian population of for instance Surinam, the Aruban Indian community apparently, was well aware of their obligations and the limitations ensuing from them (see Kambel and Mackay 1999).

The largest Indian rebellion took place in 1795, three years after the dissolution of the Dutch West India Company. 1795 was a memorable year all over Europe and the Caribbean. The French revolution promoted freedom for the oppressed, even including the Caribbean slave populations. In French Saint-Domingue (Haiti) Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolution was in its fourth year. In Curaçao, a large slave revolt took place and in the neighboring Coro region in Venezuela, thousands of slaves refused to live under conditions of slavery. Both revolts were inspired by the successes of Toussaint L’Ouverture and the liberal ideology of the French revolution. In June 1795, the Indian population under the leadership of Indian lay-brother Andres Tromp, rebelled against the abuse of the ‘Herendiensten’ by Company official Jan Hendrik Jansz. During a gun battle in the Indian village of ‘Noord’, Jansz was hit by five bullets. Three other Company officers were wounded and the officers of the Company killed one Indian. Later, it appeared that Jansz had made use of the ‘herendiensten’ for his own personal benefit. Jansz was dismissed from the service of the Company. Initially Andres Tromp and several other

leaders in the Indian uprising fled the island, to seek shelter in Paraguaná, the Venezuelan peninsula just off the Aruban coast. After a few months and after publicly asking for forgiveness to the government in Curaçao, the Indian men were allowed to return to their island without having to face legal persecution.

After 1795, colonization started on a more serious level. Aruba's Horse Bay became a mercantile port of some importance to the trade between Curaçao and the main land. The trade policy towards Aruba was liberalized and the Aruban trade experienced a temporarily increase because of the war of independence in Venezuela in 1821 and 1822. The discovery of gold in 1824 resulted in increased migration of white colonists and African slaves to the island. The Indian population integrated rapidly into the colonial society. Nevertheless, recurring protests against the colonial authorities were guided by descendants of Andres Tromp, at least until 1827.

In 1823/4, with the introduction of the new colonial laws, the former 'statute labor' was reintroduced under the name 'labor duty'. Although the feudal connotation of the statute labor system was abandoned, male inhabitants between 15 and 50 years of age could still be forced to assist in public works, such as repairing public roads, cleaning water reservoirs and so forth. Between 1824 and 1831, Indian resistance was related to the gold mining activities on the island. In 1824, Indians were obliged to assist in the mining activities, which they refused. In 1827 and 1831 - after government exploitation of the gold deposits turned out unsuccessful - the Indian population revolted after it was excluded from private exploitation of the goldfields.

Afterwards, popular rebellions on Aruba lost their Indian character. Gold mining did not bring the prosperity so badly hoped for. Because of the growing poverty, unemployment relief replaced labor duty. Unemployed who received compensation for their labor, by now maintained the same roads that before had been maintained by means of labor duty. In the 1859 refusal to assist in public works by means of labor duty, the Aruban population protested against this outdated obligation. However, no references were made to the Indian roots of this colonial practice.

The Indian population by then had been incorporated in the colonial society which had developed on the island. After the dissolution of the 17th and 18th century Indian reserve, in the 19th century colonial community, statute labor could no longer function as a social contract between the colonial government and the Indian population. In the 18th century, statute labor was an alternative to paying taxes. In the 19th century, paying taxes and other civil obligations became the alternative to statute labor. To the local community it was either one or the other.

Two patterns reoccur in the Indian rebellions. The first one is that in all the cases which I was able to analyze, Indians referred to the traditional contract with the Company in their refusal to agree to changes in the nature of the 'herendiensten'. Indians did not resist to the system of statute labor as such. They were very much aware of their customary rights and obligations. Apparently, the Indians did not consider the system of statute labor as a type of subordination, but as a social contract between them and the West India Company. The second pattern is that the richest Arubans, who also were the religious leaders, guided the Indian resistance to the

gradual breakdown and the growing ‘colonial presence’ on Aruba. Andres Tromp for instance was the leader of the 1795 rebellion, but also the lay brother of the catholic Indian community. Catholicism provided the Aruban Indians with a social institution that was able to unite the Indian community in their resistance to the loss of autonomy on ‘their island’.

Conclusion

The Indian history of Aruba after 1499 is fascinating and unique in the Caribbean. The Aruban Indian – either a Caquetio or a later arrived Indian - plays an important role in the islands discourse on its national identity. Clearly, Aruba’s Indian heritage is kept alive as invented tradition in which fact and myth go together. In this contribution, I have discussed some of the ‘facts’ behind the ‘myth’. However, additional research is necessary. There are still many questions unanswered concerning Aruba’s Spanish period between 1499 and 1636 (see Cardot 1982, Deive, 1996). In addition, a comparison of the survival strategies of for instance the Goajira (Perrin 1980) and the Island Caribs (Boucher 1992) to the Indian community of Aruba may shed new light on the continuity and discontinuity of Indian life in the Caribbean region before and after 1492.

To complete the approach between archeology and history/anthropology it is necessary to analyze the way Amerindian facts and myths are used in the construction of national or sub national identities in the Caribbean region. A comparison of the role of the Indian past in the national, political or even commercial discourse of societies, such as for instance Puerto Rico (Rouse 1992: 161-4; Duarte 2002), Dominica (Hulme 1995), Bonaire (Havisser 1995) and St. Vincent (Gullick 1995) demonstrates that neither archeologists nor historical anthropologists work in a politically neutral context (Williams 1983, Price and Price 1996).

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Abbreviations

- ARA Algemeen Rijksarchief (Dutch National Archives, The Hague)
 OAC Oud Archief Curaçao, Bonaire en Aruba tot 1828 (Old Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba until 1828).
 WIC West Indische Compagnie (Archives of the West India Company)

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Tables

Table 1: Number of Indians on Aruba by sex and age class, June 28, 1715

Men	67
Women	162
Boys	66
Girls	78
Infants	20
Total	393

Source: Jordaan 1997: 121

Table 2a: Number of cows per household, June 28, 1715.

Cows	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20 <
Number of households	8	11	6	2	1	2

Source: Jordaan 1997: 122.

Table 2b: Number of sheep per household, June 28, 1715

Sheep	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20 <
Number of households	15	4	5	1	1	4

Source: Jordaan 1997: 122.

Table 2c: Number of goats per household, June 28, 1715

Goats	>10	10-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	200 <
Number of households	-	17	8	1	3	2

Source: Jordaan 1997: 122.

Table 3: Size of provision grounds per household, 1767

Size of provision ground	Company servants	Indians, colonists and former company officials
None	-	4
Less than 1 hectare	3	58
1 – 2 hectare	4	31
2 – 4.5 hectare	3	9
4.5 hectare and over	2	6
Total	12	108

Source: ARA.WIC. inv. nr. 607, December 12, 1767.

Table 4a: Number of sheep per household (not in the service of the WIC), 1767.

Sheep	0	1-30	30-59	60-89	90 <
Number of households	91	13	2	-	2

Source: ARA.WIC. inv. nr. 607, December 12, 1767.

Table 4b: Number of goats per household (not in the service of the WIC), 1767.

Goats	0	1-30	31-60	61-90	91 <
Number of Households	30	55	18	1	4

Source: ARA.WIC. inv. nr. 607, December 12, 1767.